

Men, Patterns of Dust

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P R E F A C E

This is a selection from the oral poetry of three tribal Communities of Orissa--the Santals, the Hos and the Koyas. While the Santals and the Hos inhabit the northern districts of Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh and Keonjhar, the Koyas live in the Malkangiri sub-division of Koraput district in southern Orissa. Temperamentally, ethnically and culturally, the Hos and the Santals are somewhat akin to each other, but they are significantly different from the Koyas of southern Orissa. The Santals have now a script of their own, the Ol Chiki, in which books and journals are being published. This was 'discovered' by Pandit Raghunath Murmu, their great spiritual leader or Guru Gomke. Raghunath Murmu is perhaps the one single leader who has given the Santals a sense of intense pride in their cultural heritage and Great Tradition. He has written a number of plays, textbooks and general literature, the most important of which is *Hital*. *Hital* has not yet been published. In this book Murmu attempts a reinterpretation of the Santal world-view and the mythical events that characterised the birth of the first man and woman in Santal society and the emergence of different septs. Incidentally also, he seeks to provide answers to some of the vexed questions of social mores and values troubling today's Santal polity. Extracts from the unpublished manuscript of *Hital* are presented here in translation with the hope that this will open not merely a window on Santal life and culture but also the work of one of the most articulate of Santal culture-heroes.

The *Binti* song which is recited at the time of marriage is the Santal Song of Creation. It has a special relevance

to the understanding of Santali life and culture. Along with these a selection of different varieties of Santali songs, Ho and Koya songs are presented in this selection.

The songs of each tribal group has been prefaced by a general introduction giving a very brief but essential outline of its material, physical and cultural profile. This, it is hoped, will help in the understanding of the legends and songs that follow. The oral poetry of the tribes has relevance not merely as ethnic data but as *literature* and as giving an interesting view on "other cultures" which can have a relevance to the life-denying, cynical attitudes and life-styles that so much characterise modern society. The tribal world has not yet given up its sense of joy and fulfilment, its willingness to participate in the art of living life and finding some meaning through that process even in the midst of grinding poverty and deprivation. There is still a sense of gratitude for the fact of being alive and sharing in the life of the community. In brief, it is not yet sick of life and has not given it up. Instead it has a deep and loving commitment to life and to the joys and wonders of the natural and physical world as also the shared destiny of the community. There, perhaps, it has a very great relevance to our time and to our culture.

The author will feel his labours amply rewarded if readers can share some of the joy and elation he had in participating and enjoying the songs and their performances in these three tribal communities.

Sitakant Mahapatra

CONTENTS

Preface

I	THE SANTALS :		
	THEIR POETRY, LEGEND AND MYTHOLOGY	1	
	Introduction	...	3
	Songs :		
	Baha	...	17
	Sohrae	...	22
	Love	...	27
	Marriage	...	30
	Death	...	34
	Binti :		
	The Song of Creation Myth	...	36
	Hital (Extracts)	...	45
II	THE POETRY OF THE KOYAS	...	73
	Introduction	...	75
	Songs :		
	The Peacock Dances	...	83
	The Empty House	...	85
	Sweet-Potato Creepers	...	87
	Useless as Dimiri Flower	...	89
	O Spirit of the Hills	...	91
	We are the Marat Leaves	...	93
	White As A Crane	...	95
	The Roads of Malkangiri	...	96
III	THE HOS AND THEIR POETRY	..	97
	Introduction	...	99
	Songs :		
	Mage Parab	...	106
	Baha	...	108
	Marriage	...	110
	Love	...	115

APPENDICES

Appendix I : Glossary of non-English words 117

Appendix—II : Two extracts from
***Horkoren Mare Hapramka Reak Katha* 119**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Poetry

Quiet Violence
The Other Silence
Old Man in Summer
The Jester and Other Poems
The Song of Kubja and Other Poems

Tribal Poetry

The Empty Distance Carries
The Wooden Sword
Staying is Nowhere
Forgive the Words
Bakhens : Ritual Invocation Songs of a Primitive
Community

Essays on Literature and Culture

The Curve of Meaning
Barefoot into Reality
Gestures of Intimacy

Translated and Edited

Ants and Other Stories by Gopinath Mohanty
Oriya Poetry Today in Indian Poetry Today,
Volume-3

Longing for the South : An anthology
of Macedonian Poetry (with J. T. Boskovski)

Orissa—Kunst und Kultur in
Nordost—Indien (German; with Eberhard Fischer
and D. Pathy)

THE SANTALS :

THEIR POETRY, LEGEND AND MYTHOLOGY



The Santal Dancers

INTRODUCTION

The Santals are among the most important tribes of India both from the point of view of their total population and their emphasis on a sense of shared Great Tradition.

As per the Census their population was little above four million. They inhabit a contiguous area comprising of southern Bihar, western part of West Bengal and northern Orissa.

Like most other tribal societies, the Santals did not have a written language for a long time. Due to the exigencies of geographical distribution they have adopted Bengali, Oriya and Devnagari scripts for purposes of writing. In addition, Roman script have also been adopted particularly by those members of the tribe who have been converted to Christianity. Thus they use as many as four scripts for purposes of writing in their language. This has inevitably led to some kind of a cultural fragmentation and in the interest of integration and to achieve a greater sense of communication, they were on the look out for a new script which could be adopted by all members of the tribe irrespective of the State to which they belonged. At one time, in the last thirties and early forties of this century, there were at least four different scripts which were competing for adoption. Finally Ol Chiki, the script which Pandit Raghunath Murmu of Mayurbhanj district of Orissa had "discovered", was adopted.

The Jharkhand movement which had its origin in the early forties was the political manifestation of the sense of common destiny and Great Tradition which the Santals

or at least their elites believed in and projected. Jaipal Singh, the able tribal leader, had sought to enlist in this movement not merely the Santals but also the neighbouring Mundas and Hos. This was, however, not to be. The movement towards tribal solidarity came up against the political party-system that developed after Independence. Very soon Jharkhand Movement became a prisoner of political pluralism. Even in traditional Santal villages, in villages predominantly inhabited by the Santals, one can notice various groups owing their loyalty to different political parties. Thus the concept of Jharkhand as a political ideology arising out of the cultural roots of Santali Great Tradition died almost a natural death.

There was also conflict between the ritual-based leadership and the modern leadership thrown up by the Panchayati Raj system that rejected ritual and tried to bring in secular technology. The drive for a new script, the reinterpretation of tradition, myth and identity-symbols in the work particularly of Pandit Raghunath Murmu gave a new dimension to the emergent conflict between the new leadership and the old and the new patterns of socio-economic development and the old pattern of value-systems and simple primitive technology. The Santal experience has thus much greater relevance to patterns of change in new societies : the dilemma of reconciling the cultural autonomy of a tribe with socio-economic integration.

The historical evolution of southern Santal society was, in some respects, significantly different from that of northern Santal society because of the enlightened Maharaja of Mayurbhanj who made conscious attempts to foster amity and good relations between the Santals and the non-tribal Hindus in what was then the Mayurbhanj State. Historical records demonstrate the interest successive Maharajas took in this matter. For example, during the annual Car festival (*Rath Jatra*) at Baripada, the

Santals were encouraged to come and participate in the function in a big way, and a sense of involvement in the festival was always evident, generally supporting the view that Lord Jagannath was initially the god of the tribals.

Chaitra Parva (spring festival), the annual *Chhou* dance festival at Baripada, also drew Santals in large numbers. The ritualistic base of the Hindu *Chaitra Parva* and *Chhou* dance closely resemble the Santal flower festival (*Baha Parab*). Archer rightly compares it to the Christian festival of Easter, since the two festivals correspond to "an exaltation in the brilliant weather and the flowering trees and the sense of sprouting life." Both celebrations coincide with the advent of spring, when the bitter winter of the hills is at an end, there is a virtual resurrection of life in nature, and the trees are full of new leaves and flowers. *Chaitra Parva*, which comes in April, has the twin aspects of spring's delicate wistfulness and the vibrant energy of the coming summer. It is the time when the *sal* trees are in blossom everywhere and the mild spring sun is fast transforming itself into the mighty Sun-god roaring in the empty blue of the April sky.

The Santals have the *Pata* festival in mid-April. In Mayurbhanj and Singhbhum the *Pata* festival has essential similarity with the *Bhokta* ritual. This used to be associated with the *Uda* or the swinging-by-hook festival which has been declared now a criminal act by legislation because of the danger to human lives. It is not only the Santals: the Mundaris and Oraons of Singhbhum and Sundergarh districts also observe during April the famous Sarhul festival. This is the beginning of the hunting excursions for the Mundaris and Oraons¹.

The merger of the state with Orissa in 1947 gave a serious jolt to this smooth relationship. The dissatisfaction and resentment of that year led to widespread agitation, which seriously threatened law and order. One of the major objectives of the agitation was non-co-operation with the Dikus, the non-Adivasis, in all possible ways. The suppression of the disturbances by force, the application of the penal provisions of the law, and the imposition of a punitive tax became the starting point for a new political "rank path". The elite in Santal society took full advantage of the resentment and sought to give a new meaning, a new dimension and urgency to the question of internal and external solidarity. There was a demand for the refund of the collective fines imposed on the tribals.

An Adivasi Cultural Association came into being in 1953 and proposed the adoption of the OL script. Among the objectives of the Association were (1) to make the Adivasis (Mundari group) literate with the help of OL script; (2) to enrich the Mundari literature by collecting old songs and traditions; (3) to write and publish books for class-room reading; (4) to encourage Adivasi songs and dances; (5) and to publish and disseminate a paper on social ideas. The Association, subsequently renamed as "Adivasi Socio-Educational and Cultural Association", has continued to be vocal in its efforts towards fostering recognition of the OL script and revival of the old Santal tradition. It publishes a monthly paper, *Sagen Sakam*, and insists that the Santal religion is not Hinduism but Sarana and the common language Mundari, for which the OL script suggested by Pandit Raghunath Murmu should be recognized. It is significant to note that on February 25, 1979, about ten thousand Santals came in procession to Calcutta and presented to the Chief Minister of West Bengal a memorandum asking for the recognition of OL script.

It is interesting that in one of the Association resolutions there was a reference to the recognition of the community headman as the authority in setting "social disputes". This is significant as a recognition of the continuing operational value of the traditional leader and the difficulty of setting disputes through the agency of the political system of Panchayati Raj.

The contra-acculturative process which started in the late forties had two main objectives : to arrest the process of Sanskritization and complementary Westernization, and simultaneously to close the widening *social distance* between the *elite* and the *folk*. It is necessary at this stage to emphasize the point that ecological adaptation is not a static concept : It involves the dynamics of multilevel changes and their continuous interaction.

The movement for a separate script, for non-participation in Hindu festivals, and for the reinterpretation of myth and tradition has, however, yet to become part of the heritage of the folk. It is in this context that the "rank concession syndrome" of Orans shows some peculiar features among Mayurbhanj Santals. "Fear and envy of the Diku as the clever cheat and the big and new people" is very much in evidence.

II

The Santal personality is extremely charming. He is fond of songs and dances and his world-view is characterised by a love of fun and frolic, good food and good drink, singing and dancing. It is the pleasure principle that dominates his thinking and being. It is a well-integrated tribal community despite the divisive forces of modern political system and economic development.

The Santal villages are dotted all over the undulated planes of Chhotnagpur, Mayurbhanj and the western part of

West Bengal. Small hill ranges bare of vegetation during the summer and lush green during the rains punctuate the flowing valleys. Sal and Mahul trees, Karam, Pipal, Palas and Lac-bearing Kusum are the main flora of the region. The sal tree, called as Sarjom by the Santal—a tree yielding hard timber and straight and tall—is perhaps the most important tree for the Santals. It is holy because in a cluster of sal trees, the sacred grove of the Jahera is located. It is here that the Maran Buru, the Maneko Turuiko and other important gods of the Santal pantheon reside. A sal tree also is a common symbol for a girl. The idea of feminine beauty is symbolised by the tall and slim sal tree. A sal tree in blossom is also a common symbolism for a girl full of beauty and elegance. Apart from building houses with sal timber, its leaves are made into leafcups and plates. The Mahul tree is equally useful and its sweet flower are eaten raw. The sun-dried Mahul flowers are also preserved for months. They also prepare Mahua wine from it.

The Santal village is generally neat and clean with a road running through two rows of houses. The Santal house is a model of strength, elegance and beauty. The mud walls of the house are beautifully plastered with cowdung and are so smooth and polished that they can be the envy of modern builders. They are painted with floral designs and geometrical patterns using four primary colours, namely, white, black, red and yellow. The black colour is made out of burnt straw and the other colours are from types of local soils used for the purpose. To these they add the glue from local trees that gives the shine and polish to the colour.

March and April are the months of joy for the Santal. It is the time when the sal and mahul trees are in flower and the entire landscape becomes a riot of colours with the Palas and Simul, the Sal and Mahul in blossom. The

Baha festival or the Flower festival of the Santals is celebrated during this period and the gay abandon and festival spirit which characterise its celebration are akin to the Cherry-blossom season in Japan.

The Santals have a cycle of festivals, most of which have religious overtones. In these festivals the tribal deities are worshipped and their blessings sought for the welfare of the community, for peace and plenty. The prayers accompanying these festivals are known as Bakhens and these have been presented here in some detail. Magic and witchcraft are still prevalent among the Santals and they have a very rich repertoire of folklore. The Santal Ojha occupies a very respectable position in society as he is supposed to exorcise evil spirits and cure diseases by spiritual methods. Generally women are supposed to practise witchcraft and many murders take place because of suspicion of witchcraft practice.

III

Raghunath Murmu's precise contribution to the cause of Santal solidarity is yet to be discussed in detail with reference to his literary and cultural works and other organisational activities. There are various difficulties and underlying reasons for this. Murmu is not a very articulate person, let alone having a charisma of his own. He certainly does not answer to the definition of a rebellious prophet (Stephen Fuchs), or an inspired activist leader. He is not like Birsa Munda nor had he inspired the Santal community to any large-scale direct political movement to assert its individuality in political or ideological terms. Yet, his activities, inspiration, and writings, are possibly the greatest single unifying force for the Santal community and has helped mould a sense of its identity.

In a number of creative works Raghunath Murmu has also sought to outline his conception of the glorious

heritage of Santali culture, and his approach to certain predominant socio-cultural questions like drinking of *handia* (rice-beer), intrasept marriage, individual morality and social ethics, the propitiation of gods and even physical culture. These works are semi-fictional. Three of them *Bidu-Chandan* (Oriya edition : 1942, Bengali edition : 1948), *Kherwal Bir* (Oriya edition : 1944, Bengali edition : 1952) *Darege Dhan* (in Ol script :) are plays. *Hital* (unpublished) which is in two parts are songs to thank the Creator (this is perhaps his most important creative work) and *Bakhen* which is again a collection of invocatory songs meant for different occasions. The first two plays are extremely popular as they are very much stage-worthy and have an intense and rich story content. Both hark back to a mythical time in the past and through their protagonists, Bidu in *Bidu-Chandan* and Kherwal in *Kherwal Bir*, Murmu has sought to project certain human qualities and values which, according to him, are essential features of true Santal character. There might have been degeneration and corruption in historical times due to evil influences of the non-tribal world to which the Santal has fallen a prey but these are superficial trauma which would be rectified by a proper understanding of, and return to, the roots of the culture. This is why, myth history and current social concerns mix interesting in these two plays.

Kherwal Bir depicts a mythical past in which an intensely humane king called Manmi rules over his subjects. In course of time the population goes on expanding, there is poverty and want, some people became greedy, rapacious and take to evil means and irreligious paths. They form a group and worship dark witches and evil gods or *bongas* and start human sacrifice to gain power and authority from such gods. This group is called Danmis. Gradually, their numbers and power grow, they defeat the Manmi group and capture the

kingdom. The latter run away to the jungles but even then there is no respite for them from the attacks of the Danmis. They capture the selected heroes and warriors of the Manmis and give them in sacrifice to the evil Gods and enslave the rest of the group. The Manmi king hides in the forest with his queen. He loses the battle, is captured and killed. His wife gives birth to a glorious son who is protected by *Dharam Baba* (another name for Maran Buru) in the shape of a lion and lioness. When the boy is fifteen the queen has a dream that he would be called Kherwal and would defeat the Danmis. The Danmis are ultimately defeated in the battle by this young and divinely-inspired warrior but by then the Danmis set fire to the capital. Kherwal is enthroned king, given the title of *Bir* and married to a girl called Kajal who was also a devotee of *Dharam Baba* and had helped him in many ways to fight the Danmis.

The concept of Danmi and Manmi are clearly borrowed from the Hindu mythology of the fight between *danavas* and Gods. Here instead of Gods we find *manavs* or men or Godmen. This is a classic struggle of virtue and justice against injustice and vice. Many groups and communities use it as a myth of inherent moral superiority. Kherwal is the original name of the Santals and, therefore, the play invests the tribe with this quality of moral superiority. Every tribe and nationality, in some part of the world, every valley or cluster of hamlets, refers to itself in favourable terms and to others unfavourably. This is the universal practice of distinguishing the in-group or what Cooley calls the *Primary group* from the outgroup and is a part of the sentiment of ethnocentrism. In the present context Danmi could mean either the Dikus the non-tribals or all those who are not Santals.

Murmu's play *Darege Dhan* extols the virtues of a spartan approach to life. It emphasises the role of socialisation

processes like the community songs and dances, the annual hunts and festivals. It upholds the need for a healthy and vigorous community and advocates restriction on the use of *handia* to ceremonial ritual functions. It reminds the Santals that they will never be held in esteem by non-tribals unless they shun their bad habits which enervate them and make them objects of ridicule.

Murniu has also compiled the invocatory songs or prayers prevalent in the Santal community. These are brought together in a small book called *Bakhen*. Elsewhere he has extolled the role of these prayer-songs in maintaining the strength, the individuality and separate character of Santali culture. He has also said that the people should not forget these prayer-songs and every Santal should know them. These invocatory songs are of the following types meant for different specific occasions.

1. *Mage*
2. *Baha* (Flower festival)
3. *Eroh* or *Erok* (Sowing ceremony)
4. *Sura Sagen Mah Mane* (Post-sowing prayer)
5. *Asadia* (De-weeding ceremony)
6. *Jam Nowa* or *Nowa Hulu Rokab* (New harvest)
7. *Janthar* (Harvesting)
8. *Got Puja in Sohrae* (Worship of domestic animals)
9. *Guhai Puja in Sohrae* (Worship in the cattle shed)
10. *Rashi Puja* (Worship of *handia*)
11. *Rashi Puja* (When relations come)
12. *Chatiar Nimda* (Worship after child-birth)
13. *Bapla* or *Itut Sindur* (Worship during marriage festival)
14. *Kuli Bida* (Farewell to the bride after marriage)

15. *Nahan and Bhandan* (Bathing during the bone-drowning ceremony)
16. *Giditara* (Prayer before eating the *bhog* during Sohrae)

In *Bidu-Chandan*, he tries to bring out the theme of self-sacrifice and commitment to the community powerfully. Bidu and Chandan are renowned dancers and they have been directed by the Almighty (Maran Buru) to descend on the human world and remind men of the essential spiritual qualities of dances and songs and the living heritage of the tribe. In his preface to the play, Raghunath Murmu has insisted that the play related to the divine play of a god and a goddess and that he has tried to collect only a fraction of their universal and comprehensive divine lessons. In the play Bidu is the self-sacrificing youngman who is divinely inspired and the corrupted men in society look upon him as mad. He, however, has dedicated himself to do good to the entire community. Chaigad and Mangad are two small kingdoms established by two renowned Santal headmen (*manjhi*) in ancient times. The two kingdoms are perpetually fighting each other. Chandan is born as the daughter of the Chaigad *manjhi* who had lost his daughter by drowning. Bidu is born as a nomadic boy in a country called Bahagad whose location, seems unknown to everybody and even Bidu maintains that "It is somewhere there, far far away, perhaps a mystic land." He seeks shelter in Chaigad as also in Mangad but is misunderstood by both groups as an agent of the other side and turned away. The daughter of the *manjhi* of Chaigad, Chandan, falls in love with him and it is through self-sacrificing love that they are able to communicate with each other through the newly-found or newly-revealed script, the Ol Chiki. Secret rendezvous, places of hiding, secret messages and directions are communicated to Chandan by Bidu through this script inscribed on stones

and trees. Bidu wants to do good to both sides and put an end to their factionalism. The birds and beasts are his friends. His search is to find an identity for himself as an escape from his loneliness and he discovers the meaning of life through sacrifice, love and good deeds. Bidu and Chandan have understood the spirit of the forgotten script and in critical times Bidu is also to communicate through that script with his beloved Chandan. The script is thus, at one level, the language of life, on another level it is the revealed language of the gods known only to those who have the mystic power to discern it by love and sacrifice. Thirdly, the script also partakes of all the exclusiveness of the tribe. It is supposed to cut out the others. It has thus elements of secretiveness, mystery, divine dispensation and solidarity.

At the end of the play, Bidu and Chandan vanish from the scene. Divine dancers they have to return to their fold of divinity. But enough has happened for both the people of Chaigad and Mangad to realise their ignorance and folly in not recognising these divine agents and now they become one by coming together and resolving in prayer to abide by the lasting human qualities of life. The age of guilt ends and a genuinely humane and communitarian culture is born.

Hital (unpublished manuscript) is in two parts and seeks to reconstruct the origin and migrations of the Santal tribe or rather the Kherwals up to the present times. There are narrations of supposedly historical incidents when the tribe moved from distant Gandhar near Afghanistan to the east along the Indo-gangetic plain. The historicity of these migrations is not at all free from doubt, as there is hardly any evidence, except the mention of some place names in the traditional *Binti* songs which are no doubt an important part of the folklore of the tribe. There are however, no other corroborative literary

archaeological or documentary evidence and as such, at the most, it looks like a reference to a golden age in the mythical past. But Murmu believes in it religiously and many leaders among the Santals also do so. Besides this, author has also come across evidence of this belief among the uneducated illiterate Santals in interior villages. This belief has thus penetrated deep into the community consciousness and has become a part of the lore and the legends of the tribe. This golden age was one of prosperity and plenty : there was material well-being and cultural flowering. The golden age is held as a backdrop against which the degeneration and corruption of life and society at the present times are presented.

BAHA

1

They are singing at the *akhra*
And the night is very long
Beyond the courtyard the moonlight breaks in waves
But how do I go out and attend ?

My anklets jingle as I go
My bracelets tinkle
How do I go and attend ?
My father-in-law is at home
My mother-in-law sits at the door
A lamp burns inside the room
How do I go out ?

The pitcher in my arm-pit
I went to the stream to gather water
Who played the flute as I was collecting water ?
I was so benumbed, I had no power
To even lift the pitcher of water
And returned home.

3

Little flowers have blossomed all over the fields
The sal and the mahul are in blossom
I could neither pluck the flowers from the tree
Nor from the little plants
I heard his flute and my coiffure
Arranged like a banana shoot
Was dishevelled.

4

In the pipal tree, in the banyan tree
The woodpecker pecks and sings
A dove is heaving sighs
In the shade of the pipal branches.

Perhaps swift changes are coming for the country
Perhaps something has gone wrong with our destiny
This is why the dove is heaving sighs as it sleeps
And the woodpecker is singing.

5

The nicha flowers and the palas flowers
They have blossomed all along the street
The birds are pecking at the juice
Are the birds angels from heaven ?
Are the flowers from the garden of heaven ?

6

This axe with bells tied to it
Who uses it for cutting ?
Maran Buru uses it for cutting
This is why in sixteen cities it is worshipped.

This bow with bells tied to it
Who discovered it ?
It was the goddess of Jahera
Who discovered it.

The six gods had made this bow
The five gods had supplied the arrows.

7

In the Lugu hills
There is a mah il tree with low branches
Mahul flowers lie scattered under its shade
Let us go my sister and collect it
We will offer them to Maneko-Turuiko
We will offer them to our parents.

8

The Sim Bir forest is on fire
The Man Bir forest is on fire
Who has set fire to these forests ?
The Sun God has set fire to these forests
Maran Buru incited the Sun God to do this
Let Him now send the rains to put the fire.

9

The road is narrow, my friend
We must not walk carelessly
To its right and to its left
There are fences of thorns
If we are careless the thorns would prick
The boys will fling strange comments at us
We must walk carefully.

10

In the forests the birds sing
And who is it who plays on the flute ?
Jaher Era sings
And the boys are playing on the flute.

11

The trees dressed themselves in beauty
Green leaves and flowers of so many colours
Dear friends, decorate me with these flowers
For he awaits me under the Mahul tree.

Just across the stream
He calls me from the Pipal tree
The woodpecker sings
The new year has come
And the dance starts at the akhr



12

The new leaves of banyan and pipal
Murmur in the wind
As juice drops from the flowers
The dance must start
The woodpecker sings
The barbet sings.

13

The season of the mad woodpecker
The season of the capricious barbet

The sal tree in blossom
The Mahul tree breaking
Under the weight of flowers.

Put on your ring
Put on your anklet
Put on your best dress
And come to the *akhra*
There all your friends are waiting.



SOHRAE

1

Words and whispers come floating
From inside the house
Who all are there ?

We are of the older generation
We have enough *handia* with us.

There are footsteps on the road
Who are there ?

We are boys and girls
We have the *nagara* and the *madal* with us
We are going to the *akhra* to dance and sing.

2

Do not go out on the road, my daughter
There the youngmen are all out for the dance
They have sticks in hand
And jingling anklets on feet.
Do not go out on the road, my daughter
For you are now betrothed to that youngman of
Mahulpada village.

3

Look there at my daughter
How beautiful she looks
Fresh as a *kursa* flower
But I do not know what is in her mind.
To find a groom for her
I am waiting all these days
I do not know her mind.

4

As you go on the road, you whistle and sing
The *kiya* flowers and the *champa* flowers
They are blossoming everywhere
Bring some for me.

I will bring them for you, my dear
But what would you do with them ?
You know not how to use them, my dear
You know not what to do with them.

I will put them in the plaits of my hair
I will entwine them in my coiffure.

5

The jackals came rushing into the sugarcane field
When the crop was ripe.
Who says they are jackals ?
They are only the boys and girls of the village.

6

The black hen and the white cock
And how many chicks they have got !
Many are the sons of Pilchu Halam and Pilchu Budhi.

7

The little parrot, how it weeps and weeps !
O *simul* tree you have murdered the parrot.

8

The bridegroom comes from the east
The bridegroom comes from the west
With ornaments of gold
With ornaments of silver.

9

The banana tree sways in the wind
The jamun fruits are scarlet when ripe
I am only scarlet from shame
For you swayed in the wind
And called me by name before everybody.

10

Where did you lose your flute, young man

Where did you lose your cattle ?

Did you lose your flute at the *akhra* ?

Did you lose your cattle in the forest ?

Don't forget your flute at the *akhra*, young man

Don't forget your cattle in the forest.

There are girls at the *akhra*, young man

There are tigers in the forest.

11

The cattle have gone to Badam forest

The buffaloes to the Sirijata forest

They will come home when the sun sets

They will come home when it is dark.

Keep the oil and *sindur* ready

Today is their day, the day of worship.

12

Whose cows are these ?

They are shining black and white

Whose buffaloes are these ?

They are shining black and bulky.

In the Badam forest tigers prowl

In the Sirijata forest

Leopards prowl.

13

It is morning, get up son
Stick in hand, wooden chapals on feet
Go to the forest
Take the cattle along
Take your flute and go.

Don't wake me up, mother
Don't wake me up, father
Sleep lies heavy on my eyes
I can only close my eyes and lie
And listen to the flute's call
At the midnight *akhra*.

14

The wandering mendicants
They beg at every home, each village.
The youngmen, they beg only this day !
And it is not too much that they ask
Only one measure of paddy, they ask
And one pot of *handia*.

LOVE

1

On the banks of the river
Whose is the flute that plays ?
Alas ! my heart weeps.
I have not seen with my eyes
Nor heard with my ears
Alas ! my heart weeps.

2

Sal leaves are soft and sway in the wind
My life may go, but I must pluck them.
There is a maid in the village, she limps as she moves
Though I have a wife
I must marry her.

Sal leaves are soft and sway in the wind
My life may go, but I must pluck them.
There is a youth in the village, he limps as he moves
Though he has a wife, I must have his love.

3

Along the stream
Hidden away in the branches of a tree

Do not play your flute
For, with my friends around,
I cannot respond to your call.

If I do not play my flute
How do I show my heart to you
My heart that is only a child's.

4

My friend plays on the drum
And like a young banana shooi
He sways and murmurs in the wind as he plays it
My friend plays the flute
And his body trembles like the trim bamboo leaves.

5

On the road to the market
We passed through forests, streams, mountain-passes
And yet you did not utter a single word
Now as evening draws near
Why do you pull at my sari ?

6

I went to the forest, dear mother
I saw a snake there, dear mother
The snake touched me
And now my whole body is aflame.

7

Which bonga charm can take away this poison ?
The music of the flute still rings in my ears
And the poison rises up to my chest.

8

My lover, how sweetly he plays his flute
Along the stream !
My lover, how delicately he dances in the *akhra*.

9

Your village down the stream
And we live here up-stream
But my dear, how do I float down to you
Your father and brothers stand there with bows
And arrows.
And my heart weeps for you
I am like a bird trapped in the hunter's nest.

10

Where did I lose, dear sister
My ring on the finger
Where did I lose the ring on my toe
I was taking bath in the stream
And he threw a stone at me
I was carrying a pitcher of water
And he threw a stone at me.
How can I get back the ring on my finger, dear sister
Who will give me back the ring on my toe, dear sister

MARRIAGE

1

My loving parents are now in tears
All the relatives in the inner courtyard
All my friends of childhood days
They can barely restrain their tears.

But tell me friends where and how
Do I wipe away my tears ?

2

There is a sweet young parrot at Dandbose village
Dear mother, allow me to bring in the parrot
We will build a sweet nest for her
And give her fine grains to eat.

We have neither a fine nest
Nor grains in the house
Where do we keep the dove
Please do not bring it in
The dove will pine for the forest.

3

As a child

You brought me up in your arms

You reared me all your life.

With oil and rice

With *handia* and *mahul*

With what care you reared me up

O' mother !

Why do you send me away now

Like a cow or a goat to a distant land ?

4

The shade of the tree shifts in the afternoon

The leaves look withered in the bright sun

Would you stop pulling the ends of my *sari*

Or do I call the inmates of the house ?

5

On the hills are the *ichha* flowers

I must pluck them by all means

I must put them in my hair

And go to dance in the *akhra*.

6

In the banana garden

The banana leaves glimmer

The leaves sparkle in the sun

And sing in the rain

In our house, you would shine

As a delicate banana tree.

7

My parents, they are brighter than the moon
My brothers and sisters are stars in the sky
O' my dear, why are you a flaming fire
That threatens to consume me ?

8

You love and sing
You dance around and frolic today
Tomorrow the silver ring on your fingers
The child in your lap
Tomorrow you will be so different.

9

The lovely dove
How pathetically it moans all night
Near the hill stream.

My dear, I am the dove
Moaning for you
Through the endless night.

10

Across the stream
They are carrying me away
O' Karam tree
They are sending me away from the village
They are snapping the bonds of affection.

11

As you fly away O' parrot
Remember this nest, remember this village
The moon-lit nights, the songs
The jingling anklets
The assigned names
Remember us O' parrot as you go.

12

The yellow turmeric all over your body
And you sing with your gaze fixed on the ground.

Dear brother, I look at the ground
And remember the house, the village.

13

Across seven mountains they are taking me away
Across ten streams to a distant village.
Dear brother,
My life stays in this little house
And with you all.

DEATH

1

Our milk tree, our milk tree
Our milk tree has fallen down
Where can we catch its sight again ?

She covered us, tiny pullets, with her wings
And today she shook her wings and flew away
Our hen-mother.

2

The author of my life
My shade-giving umbrella
Where have you gone
To which unknown land ?

My little dove, my sweet pigeon, my parakeet
Where have you gone
To which unknown country have you flown ?

3

What is the life of man !
Only a pot of water.
A small leak
And all the water is gone.

4

You hold the bow and arrow, little boy
You hold the axe and sickle
But death will not care
Some day it will come.

5

This joy and happiness in life
Only for a few days
To be in love with others
Only for a few days
When we turn back and leave
No one accompanies.

6

When the flowers wither, fruits stay on the tree
When dry leaves fall, the young leaves still smile.

I have travelled from village to village
And yet cannot find my father.

7

Do not cry dear, do not shed tears
He had to go
Maran Buru wished it so.
Do not cry dear, do not weep
The warm sun, the forests
The village and its people
Are all with you.

BINTI : THE SONG OF CREATION MYTH

Binti is the Santal song of cosmology and is recited by a group of three or more singers at the time of marriage ceremony. After the members of the bridegroom party arrive at the bride's house, they are asked several intriguing questions and are expected to give proper answers to these questions. No food or drinks are served unless these questions are correctly answered. The rigidity of this test has somewhat declined in recent years.

Both the questions and the answers are in the form of songs. All along, as the questions and the answers go on, there is jest and good humour. Thereafter, the members of the bride's party introduce the *Binti* song and *handia* is served liberally. The entire song is meant to put the individual occasion in a wider context, the universal context of society and tradition. Marriage as an institution is referred back to the beginning of human creation and the particular occasion of the marriage is sought to be viewed in the larger context of the creation of the world, the dawn of human civilisation, the emergence of the Santal community, its migration in historical times, etc. The whole song is a part of an important oral tradition. In every village, there are some professional singers who learn the *Binti* by heart and recite it. They hear it from their forefathers and remember it. It is true there are occasional additions or modifications which is peculiar to all oral traditions. The singers introduce the subject saying that they have not witnessed the incidents they are going to narrate but they

have learnt it by hearing from their ancestors. It is not yet written down anywhere nor is it published.

The *Binti* song is repetitive and there are many refrain lines. This adds to the total length of the performance. The *Binti* song this author had the opportunity to listen in different Santal villages including Kalimati and Sanamauda lasted from two to three hours and it went on without interruption. There are only marginal variations in the theme of the song. What is given below is only a running summary of the song as recorded at Kalimati

The world as we see it today did not then exist. Everywhere there was only endless expanse of waters. Trees, creepers, animals—nothing existed. The gods in the heavens and Maran Buru decided that they would create a world in this universal expanse of water and give birth to trees, creepers and animals. After further deliberations, Maran Buru rubbed the dirt off his left and right palms and with that fashioned two tiny birds. Then He instilled life into these birds. The bird that came out of the dirt from His left palm became a female bird, the *Hansli chene*. The other bird which was created out of the dirt from the right palm became a male bird, the *Hans chene*. The moment the two birds got life, they started singing and cackling and asked for some place where they could build a nest. Maran Buru took pity on them and through the gods directed *Kichua Raj* (the king of the earthworms) to bring some earth from the bottom of the sea and to put it on the surface of the waters. *Kichua Raj* did accordingly but all the earth that he brought dissolved in the waters of the sea in no time. Maran Buru and the gods started worrying. After lot of deliberations, they decided that a king cobra would sit on the back of the *Hara Raj* (the king of the turtles) and that on the head of the cobra a golden plate would be kept and *Kichua Raj* would put all the soil it brings up from the bottom of the sea on this plate. That is how it was done

and the earth gradually took shape. By turn trees and creepers were born. Maran Buru planted a *Karam* tree on the earth and the two birds lived in the *Karam* tree. They built a nest in the tree and laid two eggs. Out of the two eggs the first humans were born a male and a female. The moment they were born, they started crying and the whole sky was rent with their cry. All the gods and Maran Buru came down to see them. Maran Buru told the gods that these were the first human beings. He took them out of the birds' nest, placed them on the leaves of the *Asan* tree, put them in His lap and purified them by sprinkling cow dung water. He named them as *Pilchu kala* and *Pilchu kuli*. The gods built a dwelling house for the *Pilchu kala* and *Pilchu kuli* where they lived. Gradually they grew up and from childhood passed into youth. So long they were living naked and did not know what was shame. In the meantime, the gods consulted Maran Buru as to how mankind would grow in numbers. Maran Buru advised *Pilchu kala* and *Pilchu kuli* to cook rice with *sagah* grass seeds and to soak it with water and three powdered *ranu* (a substance used for fermentation). Maran Buru told them that this should be allowed to ferment for three days and after that the liquid portion should be decanted out and taken after offering it to Him. As per His direction, *Pilchu kala* and *Pilchu kuli* prepared this drink called *handia* and took it. They felt the stirrings of sex and fell in love. With love came feelings of shame, sin, good and evil. Maran Buru appeared before them and *Pilchu kala* and *Pilchu kuli* confessed their sense of guilt and shame for having fallen in love. He advised them to wear the leaves of trees. He also explained to them that there was no sin in love and that it was the most sacred human emotion. He directed them to live as husband and wife from that day. He also directed them to cultivate the land and to earn their livelihood. They lived accordingly and with the passage of time they had seven sons and seven daughters. These children, in their

turn grew up and passed from childhood and adolescence to youth. They used to go to the forests for *shikar*. The young maidens also used to go to the forest to collect flowers and fruits. During their sojourn in the forests, the seven sons and seven daughters of *Pilchu kala* and *Pilchu kuli* fell in love in pairs. Maran Buru advised *Pilchu kala* and *Pilchu kuli* that there was no sin in it even though they were brothers and sisters. But later marriage was to be according to prescribed laws of *gotras*. Once while haunting in the forest, they killed a *Murum enga* (a female animal resembling a large-sized deer) by hitting it with an arrow. It was so big that they could not carry it back home. So they decided to cut it into pieces in the jungle itself. They were surprised when they discovered a living human being inside the stomach of the animal. They named this child as *Bitol Murmu*. Thereafter they cooked the meat and had a feast in the forest. Different kinds of functions had to be performed from the point of killing and dressing *Murum Enga* to the final feast. Depending upon these functions, the performers were assigned particular *parises* (*gotra*) and they were the following :

- (1) Murmu
- (2) Harisda
- (3) Hembrom
- (4) Marandi
- (5) Soren
- (6) Tudu
- (7) Kisku
- (8) Baske
- (9) Chane
- (10) Besra
- (11) Denda
- (12) Gondwar.

Since *Bitol Murmu* had come out of the stomach of the *Murum Enga*, he was assigned all the social functions

relating to birth, death, etc. Likewise other functions were assigned to other *gotras*. Gradually mankind increased in numbers with the birth of children to these seven parents, the sons and daughters of *Pilchu kala* and *Pilchu kuli*. They assembled in the shade of three trees in the forest, namely, *lepej reel* (*the kendu tree*), *Khad matkom* (*Mahul tree*) and *Ladeya Bale* (*banyan tree*) and discussed where to establish their settlement. It took twelve long years to come to this decision and ultimately in the shade of *Sari Sarjom* (*sal tree*) they took the final decision where to locate their settlement. They tied a brownish pullet or young fowl at a particular spot for five days and five nights and after that found that this young fowl was not killed by any animals of the forest. Then they decided that, that was the proper place for a human settlement. The *sal* tree under which the fowl was tied was designated as *Jaher Era* or the sacred grove where they worshipped their deities and lived in a settlement nearby.

The song then goes on to describe the growth of the population of the tribe, its migration through different places, such as Hihidi, Pipidi, the warfares that had to be waged with local inhabitants as they continued their victorious onward journey and how they finally came to the land where they live at the present times. It ends by recounting how they remember all this with gratitude to their ancestors whose blessings are then invoked for making the particular marriage ceremony a happy communion of souls.

HITAL

Hital is the unpublished manuscript in the possession of Pandit Raghunath Murmu. *Hital* which literally means in praise of the Creator, is a group of songs in Santali in praise of Maran Buru, the Supreme God of the Santali pantheon. In this Raghunath Murmu gives the genealogy of the Pilchus as a part of the Santal cosmology. Pilchu Halam and Pilchu Budhi were the first man and woman to be created. The songs delineate how Pilchu Halam and Pilchu Budhi brought up their children, how the boys and girls came up age, how they took *handia*, fell in love and how they realised that there is no shame or guilt attached to love when it is divinely ordained. *Hital* has not yet been published but it is in beautiful flowing Santali and has been presented through recitation and singing at several meetings of Santali people. For the first time a selection from different chapters of Part 2 of *Hital* are presented here.

In *Hital* Murmu has also sought to supply answers to some of the vexed questions presently troubling Santal society and culture. Let us take two of these, namely, drinking of *handia* and intra-sept marriage. In the second part of *Hital* Murmu describes how, when the seven sons and seven daughters of Pilchu Halam and Pilchu Budhi (the first man and woman, comparable to Adam and Eve) came of age, they thought of preparing *handia* and offering it to the children after observing the necessary ritual functions. Since all of them were brothers and sisters they had a guilt complex to think of sex among themselves. The oldman and the old woman

prayed to Maran Buru and as per his blessings prepared *handia* in a prescribed way and offered it to the children with the words that this is *dharam* or virtue. The relevant lines run like this :

- (1) *Dharam reya kan na add handib menah*
Ili daka reya kan adi sibila.
(It is a thing of *dharam* called *handib* or *handia*. It has been made out of soaked rice and is very fragrant and pleasant).
- (2) *Ranahan rankan nas add bishon biskan*
Sahananyun lagid dansa yui reya lek-kan
(It is a medicine, it is also poison. It enlivens and freshens).
- (3) *Menma atha olid banga lagti ahi jge*
Dharam bonga aya karege handi yun lek-kan
(It is wrong to use it out of time but it is necessary to drink it at the time of *dharam karam* or religious worship)
- (4) *Pilchu tikin andekhan hapan Ka takin*
Juri Jana lagid harkin alah jul adak.
(After this *Pilchu* *Halam* and *Pilchu* *Budhi* opened up the path to the children to fall in the snare of love).

In the song the sons are sent to the forest for *Shikar* but the oldman and oldwoman don't follow them. Similarly the daughters are also sent to the forest to collect edibles like roots and leaves. *Handia* makes them happy, courageous and also forgetful. It takes away the guilt-complex and enables the brothers and sisters to have sex and thereby ensure the continuity of the tribe. The girls while collecting forest products, retire to the shades of trees and sing and dance. As the dance-rhythm mounts to a crescendo they pair off and go into the forest and have

sex. But after the spell of *handia* wears off, they are full of guilt and remorse and, corresponding to this sense of human guilt nature responds by thunder and lightning and torrential rain. When the rains stop, they return to the village but remain hiding in the Jahera. Their parents seek them out only the next morning. At night the old couple have divine intimation from Maran Buru that this is a part of the law of nature and there should not be any feeling of guilt.

- (1) *Dharamge aped nankay jata akadpe*
Ape bidal donanged bugi akange.

(Dharam has made you so, to fall in love and it is good for your generation)

- (2) *Menma niva tayam ante hapan hidalad*
nonkad bang bugia kaya. Huyuah.

(But after this, your progenies and subsequent generations can't and should not do this as it will be a sin for them).

Then with the grace of Maran Buru they name the septs.

Through this mythology Murmu projects the following ideas on *handia*-drinking and marriage within a particular sept :

- (1) That the drinking of *handia* is part of religious ritual ;
- (2) that it leads to health, vigour and youthfulness ;
- (3) that it induces love and is an essential ingredient of love ;
- (4) that it dispels fear ;
- (5) that it is really a sacrament.

Its use, therefore, should be on proper ritual festival occasions as a part of the offerings first made to the gods or *Bongas*. It thus has sacramental properties. Its indiscriminate use is to be condemned. Similarly, in the beginning of creation intra-sept marriage was necessary for the continuity of the tribe and moreover, it was divinely ordained but thereafter it has lost its *raison d'etre* and validity and should never be allowed.

HITAL

(Extracts)

CHAPTER - I

The Genealogy of Pilchus

1

Your Dharma, your—maya
Lights us up
Lights up everything.

Your Dharma, your *maya*
Lights us up
Lights up everything.

Pilchu couple had seven sons and seven daughters.
The babies learnt to crawl on all fours
Your blessings, your affection !

2

And in human society
You have created for men to communicate
Language and all its wealth.

3

And likewise the children of Pilchu
With your blessings
They gladly took up the words in their mouth.

4

Pilchu couple made obeisance to you
Every morning
And they taught the children
Your glory.

5

The children knew nothing of your glory.
They would ask their parents
To be enlightened.

6

Who is the almighty God ?
Where does He dwell ?
What is His form ?
Why do we do obeisance to Him ?

7

Pilchu couple seeking to explain
Your glory
Raise their hands skyward
And say it is etched there.

8

He remains hidden there
In that distant sky
Unknown unseen
Look the sun gives only His light.

9

He has infinite powers
His light is scattered everywhere
In this world and in the heavens.

10

In His mercy He has gifted
Life in our hearts
Or else there would be nothing.

11

Always He, the god oversees everything
At the time of misery, anguish
He saves, He redeems.

12

For this we do obeisance to Him
Let your desire be
To do obeisance to Him.

13

Day by day let you acquire this knowledge
Let everything you do be obeisance
To the sun.

14

Seeing the parents
Likewise the children
Took to loincloth.

CHAPTER - II

The Pilchu Children grow up

1

With your blessings
Time passes
In love and affection
The Pilchu children grow.

2

In the *Jahera* many trees
According to the season
Varieties of fruits and flowers
Look pretty.

3

Savoury ripe fruits
The children look for everywhere
In pleasure.

4

Seven sons and seven daughters
They roam around together
And those who see them
Are enamoured.

5

Pilchu couple are happy
To see them
And yet what anguish remains
In their mind ?

6

In their hearts O God
You have given love and affection
And devotion too.

7

But the heart is perturbed
Anxiety and deep sorrow
Overwhelms.

The bird of life
It plays inside the body
And hunger and thirst remain.

9

Life appears to be futile
There is no peace
In the absence of timely food.

10

The food you had garnered
For the Pilchu couple
It was not adequate for their children.

11

Their bodies grew thin
For lack of food
And to extinguish the fire of hunger
They ate the leaves of many trees.

CHAPTER - III

When a tiger was eating up the Pilchu children

1

According to your desire
Or for what other reason
Evil befell the small children ?

2

Once the Pilchu boys
Got out of the *Jahera*
And roamed around.

3

They noticed fruit-laden trees
And ate the fruits called *Judi*.

4

A tiger lay in wait
And jumped at the boys.

5

The Pilchu couple had followed
The children and were near.

6

The children were not aware
Of the tiger as they ate the fruits.

7

Pilchu's wife cried out in terror
And called out to her husband.

8

Old Pilchu

He fitted his arrow to the bow

And shot at the tiger

Taking your name.

9

The tiger roared and fell back

And then the children noticed it.

10

Terrified they kept hidden

In the branches of the trees.

11

Old Pilchu reached there

And at his call

The children descended from the tree.

12

Seeing all the children safe

Pilchu made obeisance to you.

13

The children embraced their parents

And said how afraid they were.

14

In answer Pilchu asked them

To do obeisance to Dharam

Who had saved their lives.

15

Thereafter the Pilchu boys saluted you

And from the heavens you blessed them.

16

From the day after that

The children never go outside the *Jahera*.

CHAPTER - IV

When the Pilchu couple felt lost in bringing up their children

1

Even after the children were saved from this danger
The Pilchu couple did not get peace in life.

2

How the children will grow up in happiness
Was now their worry.

3

One *Jahera* could not provide
Fruits for all the children.

4

And the wild animals lay hiding
outside the *Jahera*, waiting to kill.

5

That day, like other days,
The Pilchu couple lit a fire
In front of the door of the house.

6

Till nightfall they were sitting there
Remembering your name.

7

Darkness covered everything
It was the night of silence
And the children slept quiet inside the house.

8

The old women put more logs on it
And the fire leapt up.

9

Just then from some unknown direction
A bird came flying
And dived into the fire.

10

As the Pilchu couple started taking it out of fire
It was roasted.

11

And they wondered why the bird
Came and fell in the fire.

12

Then O Lord you came
And told them that it was meant for the children.

13

They saluted you in devotion
And conveyed their gratitude.

14

In reply to their query
How the children will grow up
You asked them not to worry

15

In this world there are all kinds of food
But you have to exert to get them.

16

In all work there is hindrance
Tigers, bears, wild animals, all.

17

In appropriate time
Keeping Dharma as witness
If animals are shot by arrows
And roasted and eaten
There is no guilt, no crime.

18

In the forest begin cultivation, hunting
Drive away the enemy;
The children will grow up happy.

19

Teach the children proper work
I have sent this bird for their food.

20

Hearing this, your words O Lord
The Pilchu couple saluted you.

21

Let the children live long
And happily. Blessing thus you vanished.

22

Happy, the Pilchu couple
Wanted to tell this to the children.

23

They called out to the children
Who came near them.

24

The children were asked to
Do obeisance to the Lord
And then told the story of the bird.

25

Surprised and happy
The boys wanted to eat
The bird's meat.

26

Saluting you, the Pilchu couple
Cut it into pieces
And offered it to the children.

27

Gladly the children ate it
And said how tasteful it was.

28

After this the old man Pilchu
Narrated to them the blessings of the Lord.

29

The children are always like that
They enjoy the fruits and the meat of the forest.

CHAPTER - VIII

When the Pilchu children came of age

1

**For establishing Dharma and justice
You have thought of conjugal life, O Lord.**

2

**The Pilchu children felt stirrings
In their heart and wondered
Whether glancing at each other was a crime.**

3

**Seeing this the Pilchu oldman
Started thinking
How to tie them up in family.**

4

**Tie-up between brother and sister
Will be a crime
And there will be no salvation
Dharam will not bless.**

5

**At that time but for these
Seven sons and seven daughters
There were no other human beings in the world.**

6

**Lost in thought they prayed
To you O Lord to show them the way.**

7

You appeared before the oldman
And told him all about conjugal tie.

8

Conjugal tie between co-uterine brothers
And sisters is a crime
But in this case there will be no guilt.

9

The children, the seven pairs
They are born to be tied-up.

10

In life this is how it is
Half is man, the other half woman.

11

Similarity in manners and customs
Similarity in looks
They belong to one sept.

12

Following the true path
Teach them to come together in life
And delineate the septs.

13

After this, it won't happen again.
Persons of one sept will marry
Only in another sept.

14

If people of the same sept intermarry
They will be guilty of violation
Of the social norm of justice
And earn miseries.

15

Pilchu, oldman, got this message
And assured you to go by this.

16

I will teach this to all the children
If they don't obey, you will teach them O Lord.

17

You were satisfied, blessed him
And vanished.

CHAPTER - IX

When the Pilchu children took to drinking *handia*

1

As per your commandment
The old Pilchu couple
Set about tying up the children in conjugal love.

2

Handia was needed for this
And they went about collecting the required things.

3

You had indicated to them
How *handia* will be tasteful.

4

All those Ingredients the Pilchu couple collected
And kept them dried.

5

One day they prepared *handia*
The children did not know about it.

6

Within three days that *handia* was ripe
And it had the sweet aroma
Of ripe *damuru* fruits.

7

The children were called
And *handia* was placed before them.

8

The children asked all about it
And were told by Pilchu oldman.

9

It is a thing of Dharam
Called *handia*.
It is made out of soaked rice and very fragrant and
Pleasant.

10

It is a medicine, it is also poison
It enlivens and freshens.

11

It is wrong to use it beyond prescribed time
But it is necessary to drink it
At the time of *dharam karam* or religious worship.

12

It is required for *Dharam*
And so we have hoped
And so we have prepared.

13

Such a time has now come for you
For refreshing the body you need this *handia*.

14

Thereafter the children were happy
And wanted to drink *handia*.

15

In cups made of *sal* leaves
They first offered the *handia* to you, O Lord.

16

Then the remaining *handia*
They took, two cups each.

17

The children drank the *handia*
Sweet and sour, they felt refreshed with it.

18

After this Pilchu Halam and Pilchu Budhi
Opened up the path to the children
To fall in the snare of love.

19

Oldman Pilchu took away the daughters
And sent them to the forest to gather green salads.

20

Oldman Pilchu also sent the boys to the forest
For *shikar* and did not follow them.

CHAPTER - X

When the Pilchu children fell in the snare of love

1

Taking *handia* the Pilchu children
No longer knew any fear;
They became courageous.

2

The girls went into the Sunkud forest;
The boys went to the Khanderay forest.

3

Such is your design O Lord
They felt impelled to go
And on their own they rushed out.

4

While gathering leaves and salads
The girls went near a banyan tree
To play on the swings (on its hanging roots).

5

As they played on the swings
They sang songs
And danced the *Dahar* dance.

6

Tired out hunting in the forest
The boys were resting when
They could hear the beautiful songs of the girls.

7

They are singing, let us go and learn it-
Saying, they reached the place of the dance.

8

They played, they danced
Their hands and feet opened out
Struck against each others'
They lost all their inhibitions.

9

To each boy a girl, they paired
And so exquisite they looked !

10

To the bigger boys the bigger girls
The smaller boys to the small girls.

11

They played and they played
And lost themselves in the play.

12

And O Lord you so designed it
Hordes of illusory deer ran down by their side.

13

Let us kill them, so saying, they ran
And running along, they paired off
And went in different directions.

14

Each pair now separate
With your blessings they entered
The life of love and togetherness.

CHAPTER - XI

In love and togetherness, when the Pilchu children were afraid

1

**In human life, O Lord
You have given the sense of discrimination
To know good and evil.**

2

**Falling in love they had doubt :
Is it not a mistake, a crime ?**

3

**But the bonds were loving and strong
And the sense of guilt did not snap it.**

4

**Later, that afternoon, rain-clouds came rolling
With thunder and lightning.**

5

**The lovers now grew more anxious
Have we then sinned against Dharam ?**

6

**But where to go ? Praying to you O Lord
They remained in hiding, each pair.**

7

The sun went down and the torrential rains stopped
The loving pairs, they came out of the hiding.

8

They sang your glory
For their safety during the downpour.

9

Thereafter they thought
Of returning back home.

10

But after reaching the *Jahera*
They did not have the courage
To go to the parents.

11

Terribly afraid they spent the night
Hiding in the *Jahera*

12

The children did not come back
And it was now midnight ;
The Pilchus at home grew very anxious.

13

Let no evil befall the children
Oldman Pilchu prayed to you.

14

You appeared before Pilchu and told him
The children are now tied up in bonds of love
No evil will befall them.

15

Along with it, for their welfare
You gave all the secrets to Pilchu Halam.

16

The couple bowed before you in happiness
And you vanished into the air.

17

The night ended, morning came
The sun-god came up spreading
His golden sunshine everywhere.

18

Oldman Pilchu came looking for the children
And took them home from the *Jahera*.

19

Pilchu could know the sense of shame
Agitating the minds of the children
And lovingly called them near.

20

Afraid at heart they returned home
And stood before their parents with heads bent down.

21

You have committed no sin,
So saying Pilchu told them of your message, O Lord.

22

Dharam has made you so, to fall in love
And it is good for your generation.

23

But after this your progenies and subsequent
generations,
Can't and should not do this
It will be a sin for them.

24

And so, as ordained by the Lord,
I will now name your septs.

25

All you lovers now together
You salute the Lord and pray for fearlessness
And spend your time in love.

26

With the loving words of the parents
Their worst fears were dispelled.

27

And breathing the cool breeze of the *Jahera*
Their sense of shame vanished
And they regained their courage.

28

All the lovers and the beloved
Made obeisance to you and prayed
For your blessings.

29

'So let it be' you blessed from the sky
And hearts over-flowing with love
They all saluted you.

CHAPTER - XII

When Pilchu Haram named the different septs

1

Then the pairs of lovers
Came and saluted the parents.

2

Lord, you had told everything to Pilchu
And accordingly he prepared to name them.

3

Sprinkling water and broken rice
Pilchu then announced the names of the septs.

4

To the eldest he gave the name Hansdah
Then Murmu, Kisku, Hembrom, Marandi
Soren and the youngest was called Tudu.

5

You were happy and from the distant heaven
Blessed : 'So let it be.'

6

Realising that everything was auspicious
Pilchu and all the children saluted you.

7

Then Pilchu asked them to sit down
As he wanted to say something.

8

The pairs sat down with Pilchu
And he told them of the different septs.

9

This is how the septs became separate
But you all are never separate from each other.

10

Only the sept-trees will be different
And for preservation of sept
You will be tied in conjugal rights between septs.

11

You will have sons and daughters
And when they marry in other septs
There will be no sin.

12

The children, they will be like brothers and sisters
But they will marry from other septs.

13

And so they will live, tied up in love
And no sin will be there ; they will be blessed.

14

But if they marry within the same sept,
It will be a sin, a sacrilege.

15

This is the discipline and regulation of septs ;
Do keep it in mind and don't forget.

16 & 17

Knowing the names of their septs
They were happy and said :
Parents you have told us everything
We will never forget it.

18

But we do not know how to conduct ourselves
As husband and wife ; do tell us.

19

Lord, you had told Pilchu all these
And so Pilchu explained to them.

20

As husband and wife you have to know so much ;
As of now and in the future too.

21

Husband and wife should have love between them
But such love between another's husband
Or wife will be a sin.

22

Give respect to all, younger or elder
And have good relations among yourselves.

23

Even though you are now of different septs
Yet your sons are all brothers.

24

The daughters are all sisters
Even when married.

25

The elder brother will call the younger brother's wife
As young sister-in-law,
Will give her respect and never touch her.

26

The younger brother will call his elder brother's wife
As *bhauja* and respect her and can touch her.

27

The sons asked Pilchu : how then
Will they remain together in one house.

28

When Pilchu was in doubt
You gave him the knowledge O Lord.

29

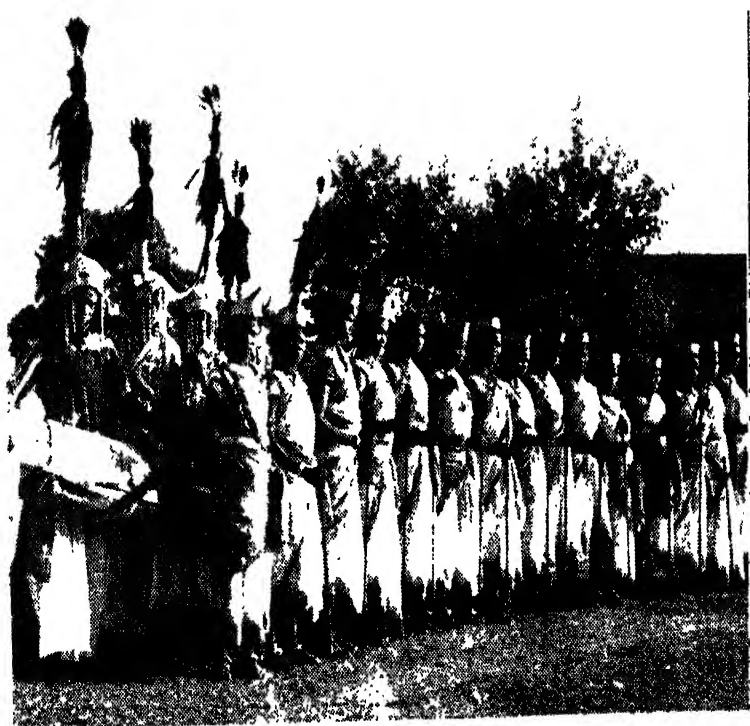
And Pilchu said : so they should build
Separate houses and live separately.

30

But remember this ever
Even though staying separate you are ail together.

II

THE POETRY OF THE KOYAS



The Koya Dancers

INTRODUCTION

The Koyas are a Dravidian-speaking tribe living in South Orissa and are mostly found in the Malkangiri Sub-division of Koraput district. They live in close proximity with the Kondhs, the Didayis and the Parajas. The Koraput District Gazetteer has the following to say about the history of the area :

"The history of the land is the history of the primitive tribes who have made it their home...The earliest inhabitants were the wild kolarian tribes which still inhabit the hilliest parts of the district and are still most tenacious of their old customs. Later to arrive were the tribes of Dravidian origin and particularly the Kondhs."

The Koya concentration is in the southern portion of Malkangiri Sub-division. The Boiparis, a group of Hindi-speaking people who have migrated to this region are professional traders who live in intense symbiotic relations with them. They provide most of the dancing dresses for the Koyas. They receive goats, paddy and pulses in exchange. The Koyas of Malkangiri also call themselves Koitors, which is also the name of a branch of the Gondi language. W. Grigson had pointed out that Koyas are nothing but the Bisonhorn Marias, a name he himself had given to distinguish the Hill Marias from these Bisonhorn Marias. From the point of view of culture there are, no doubt, a number of similarities between them. The Koyas who live

In the north Malkangiri Sub-division are somewhat more primitive than those in the South who have been influenced by the Telugu population of the adjacent areas of Andhra Pradesh. Among the northern Koyas, a loin-cloth is the normal dress except for the village headmen and few other affluent persons who can afford better dress. Now shirts have become popular and it is not an uncommon sight to see a Koya having a shirt over his loin-cloth. While the southern Koya women have been very much influenced by Telugu women's dress, in the north they wear a loin-cloth covering a portion from waist to knee and knotted just below the navel. Except when they go to the market or a festival, Koya women in the north are generally topless. The male Koyas wear a turban on their head when they go for a dance or to visit friends and relatives. Necklaces of beads of various sizes and colours, armlets of brass and aluminium are used by the women folk. They also wear ear-rings of various sizes. Besides, armlets and bracelets are also worn in large quantities.

While Koya language belongs to the Gondi dialect of Dravidian group, there has been substantial infiltration of Telugu, Hindi and Oriya words into the language. Sometimes an entire village which contain only few households shifts from place to place. This is generally done when the village suffers from large-scale epidemics or natural calamities. Koyas are believers in supernatural powers and these supernatural powers are supposed to have a say in the shaping of their individual destinies and social situations.

Grains are stored in baskets made of leaves of Siali creepers or bamboo containers. The Koya house is generally very small and is nearly always packed with domestic articles, bows and arrows, the drum (*dhol*), head dress for dancing (*perma kok*), flutes and the *ahkum* or

musical horns. They are mainly agriculturists and cultivation is still at a primitive level. They practise shifting cultivation, locally known as podu by clearing sites on the slopes of jungles. Their economic pursuits centre round the primary need for food and shelter. Pigs are reared in each house in large number and in ceremonial occasions pigs are slaughtered. In the weekly markets the Koyas purchase their needs, such as salt, clothes, onion, dry fish, oil, etc. and in exchange generally they sell their own products like millet, mustard, mahul etc. There used to be a *goti* system among the Koyas, the same way as it was among Parajas and Kondhs. The bride price is heavy in a Koya marriage. Occasions when a married man elopes with another unmarried girl or when a married woman lives with another man are not uncommon. Koya marriage or *Pendul* is, perhaps, their most important social function. While the boys and girls do select their partners during the social occasions of dancing and singing, the parents also take initiative in arranging marriages, solemnising the occasion with friends and relatives. When a boy carries away a girl with the help of his friends while she is in the forest or the fields, that marriage is known as *Karsu Pendul* or forcible marriage. The marriage ceremony normally lasts for a period of three days starting from the ceremonial fetching of water from a stream nearby by the elder brother's wife. Songs are recited on the occasion. The groom sits on the lap of his elder brother's wife and tamarind and turmeric paste mixed with ghee is smeared on his body. Next day the bride comes to the village of the groom with a number of women, comprising of friends of the girl and her relations. They come singing all the way. The groom's father sends pots of rice-beer for them even before they reach the village. On reaching the groom's village, the bride's party slows down its pace. The women continue singing. When they arrive in the village, the

male and female folk join in the dance. The men wear the *perma kok* or the bisonhorn head-dress and a garment which hangs from waist downwards. Villagers from considerable distances also come to dance in the marriage ceremony even without being invited. They are also served with rice-beer and mahul wine in addition to some rice and pork. The general courtesy is to welcome such visitors from other villages and not to deny them this opportunity. The marriage ceremony is the one occasion which leads many Koya families into debt.

At the groom's house sometimes a mock-struggle takes place between the bride's party and the groom's party. The bride is taken away from her escorts and the groom's mother washes her feet and a turmeric dot is put on her forehead. This is followed by rice-beer in leaf cups for everybody present. Thereafter the couple are taken in and water is poured on their heads and they are made to wear new clothes. The actual sanctification of marriage takes place at a spot by the side of a hill-stream where the bride and the groom are separately taken by their friends. They sit on the laps of their respective elder brother's wives and eat the food offered to them. The groom is brought back to home to drink rice-beer and the girl is kept waiting there till evening when she is brought and left in the groom's house. Next day in the morning rice-beer is given to the couple by the village priest. This is followed by group drinking of rice-beer. Till this period the bride cannot take anything in the house of the groom. As evening comes, the elder brother's wife of the groom takes the bride and leaves her in the room which is known as *Aan lon*. This is the first night when the couple spend the night together. During the marriage ceremony there are different kinds of songs sung by the girls and the women-folk of both the parties. There are songs for the various

occasions marking the different stages of the ritual. When the girl is snatched away by the groom's party during the mock struggle, there is a competition in singing songs. There is also a specific song when a girl is carried away by a man for marriage. This song is known as *Armirranad pata* or a song on running away from the village.

The headman of the village and the priest (the *Peda* and the *Perma* respectively) are important functionaries. The village magician or *Wadde* also occupies an important place. The magician's job is not hereditary in character. A person acquires this status by becoming endowed with supernatural powers. It is believed that from the childhood a person must show some characteristics like the presence of matted hair on the head to be eventually a magician. The *Wadde* is supposed to have the power to communicate with the supernatural beings and ancestors. He must also have the capacity to drive away the malevolent spirits who cause harm to the Koyas in various ways. The Koyas frequently run to these magicians for solving their personal and domestic problems.

The Koyas have almost a superhuman capacity for improvising songs. Generally there are a few fixed lines as in the case of the marriage songs or the *Pendulpata*. Some of the images are also recurrent. But the songmakers have a capacity for infinitely lengthening it by adding on lines. Sometimes I have felt they have no equals in the art of improvisation.

Their song-structures reveal superb aesthetic skill. The lyrics are charmingly alliterative. The lines have harmoniously blending metaphors and onomatopoeic words which produce an exquisite melody that appeals to the ears of even a casual listener. Invariably the real

content of the song and the words signifying specific meaning are very limited. These are, however, followed by the refrain lines of chosen words with rare melodious effect. The words used are not only highly metaphoric but also, from the point of view of sound, very much akin to each other. The tonality and rhythm of each song are thus beautifully organised and are also quite complex. Although repetition is one of the characteristics of the song, they never jar on the listeners' ears. The second important characteristic of the song is their strong visual flavour. Often the connecting words and verbs are omitted and by the juxtaposition of only the key-words as in the Japanese haiku, the meaning is revealed.

Although singing is generally done by a group, normally there is only one in each group whose is the leading voice. The others follow by singing only the refrain lines. Dancing and singing never go together. As dancing always accompanies the beating of drums, singing either precedes the drum-beat or is done when the beating of the drum is muffled and goes nearly silent. The Koya drums are fairly large and can be compared only with the Santal drums. The drum (*dola*) and the flute (*wasad*) are the main musical instruments used by them. A song goes by the name of *pala* and the act of singing is called *parna*.

Here ten songs are presented as most representative. Of these, one is a characteristic magician song. There is one song on the running away of a married man or a bachelor with a girl without a formal marriage. A third one is on the normal routine life of the Koyas. Another song recited on the occasion of Wija Pandu or the ceremonial sanctification of seeds has also been included. The remaining songs are marriage songs or *Pendulpata*.

SIRAN UGE : THE MAGICIAN'S SONG

O Goddess
Invest all knowledge and power
On this novice
O Kondagarbo and Bandimadio
Bless him, bless him.

Awaken the latent power
The power that is sharp and cutting
As the *barba* grass-blades.

At Dantagadi, at Kuakhadi and Mailaduli
And at many other places
Your secret knowledge remains hidden.

Teach him
The secret powers of the gods of
The monkeys, the leopards and the tigers ;
Teach him the hidden wealth of knowledge.

O Goddess
Let him be dressed up like us
In *dhoti* white as the flower of gourd
Let him wear in his ears
The brass ornaments resembling the
bitter-gourd flowers.

Mother, give him the comb looking like a butterfly
 So that he does his coiffeur and ties up the pigtail
 Let him wear a dress as beautiful as a pumpkin flower
 And with your blessings
 Secretly travel across the world
 Right up to your throne.

This poem is generally referred to as *Siran Uge*. The song is recited by the *Wadde* or the Koya magician invoking the blessings of the twin goddesses of magic to initiate the new entrant to this secret art. The birth of a child with matted hair indicates that he is destined to play the role of a magician or *Wadde* in future. As such, he is taken care of by an adult *Wadde* and is initiated into the intricate art of magic by performing magical rites. The guru chants incantations with sharp variations in speech and modulating his voice and also through bodily movements, frequently touching the long matted hair of the novice. Normally the incantations are very long and only a small portion of it is given here.

THE PEACOCK DANCES

Nima inga nimale
Nunile vaya nuni
Nima inga nimale.

O dear, it is our ill luck
Fate is against us.

The gathering for the marriage
It is a cluster of *kendu* fruits.

The marriage ceremony
The celebration,

Let us go
Let us go there.

The peacock dances.

We have no opportunity to dance.

The Koyas are extremely fond of singing and dancing. The marriage ceremony provides a very intimate and happy occasion when groups of singers and dancers both male and female from different villages come together and dance almost continuously throughout the days and nights of the celebration. There may be occasions when

the girls are restrained by their parents or there are other difficulties for which they are not able to participate in this happy occasion of singing and dancing.

This arrested desire to dance is reflected in the present song. One may notice the capacity for image-making in comparing the crowd gathered for the marriage ceremony to the small kendu fruits which occur in dense clusters on this forest tree. The dance in the village with its gay abandon is also compared to the peacock's dance in the forest when it sees the dark rain clouds of July. The girls who have not been able to join the dance contrast their lack of freedom and ill-luck to the peacock's joy and freedom. The second and third lines of the three lines recited at the beginning of the song are repeated as refrain lines after each stanza.

THE EMPTY HOUSE

Nima inga nima
O yaya vaya vayi
nima vaya nuni.

Our destiny, the seeds of bittergourd
The country beautiful as *Beshikara* plant.

The automobile speeding stone
Hurlled by a catapult.

Assam was like *asu pitte*
When we return from there
No cattle in the fields
No cows in the cow-shed
No fowls in the poultry shed
No goats in the shed
No grains in the store
Rice container empty
House looks like an empty container.

In this song, one can notice the Koya capacity for drawing pictures through the use of only a very limited number of words. While the two refrain lines continue the song, each stanza has only one line which also is very cryptic. Their fate is as bitter as the seeds of bitter gourd.

The country is compared to the *Beshikara* plant which resembles the turmeric and with its bushy growth and beautiful white flowers looks elegant and charming like the Koya village landscape. By contrast the foreign land where they had gone seeking jobs is compared to the crafty *asu pitte*, a long-tailed black bird symbolising craftiness and unreliability. Koyas drive away birds which eat away maize and other crops by means of stones thrown at high speed by catapults. The speed of the automobile is compared to the speed of a stone hurled by the catapult. The song thus recapitulates the experience of those who go to Assam highly elated (many Koyas migrate to the tea-gardens of Assam) with the prospects of visiting a new country. When they return, however, the pleasure turns to pain as they see that the house and all their belongings are lost. A feeling of emptiness fills their hearts. Of the first three lines at the beginning of the song, the second and third lines are repeated as refrain after each line in the song.

SWEET-POTATO CREEPERS

Nunile vaya nuni, nunile vaya nuni
nima inga nuni.

The roads are sweet potato creepers
Whether to go or not to go
We are like that
The country is like the *Beshikara* plant
The edible greens the eatable greens
We pluck these edible greens
The train is the galley worm
The road is the lizard's tail
The rail-track is the lizard's tail
Keep to the track
Let us go, let us go.

This is the song sung by a group of girls who accompany the bride to the bridegroom's village for the marriage ceremony. As the journey starts, the girls recite the song. The sweet potato plant is an extremely zigzag creeper and the narrow road which they are taking to the groom's village is compared to this zigzag creeper although the village may be beautiful like the bushy *Beshikara* plant with its bunches of white flowers. The girls seem to be in a dilemma whether to go there or not. They feel like people who really cannot decide. Their daily routine

is to collect various types of greens from the forest as life revolves round the quest for food. It is thus difficult to decide whether to go or not to go. Going to that distant village is also compared to the journey to Assam. There is always a cherished desire to travel in a train. The train with its numerous wheels is compared to the insect galley worm which crawls with a number of legs. The railway track and the serpentine road narrowing towards the distant horizon is compared to the tapering tail of a lizard. Lastly they speak of the need to keep to the track and to go to the groom's village. Here too the first two lines of meaningless melody are used as refrain after each line of the song.

USELESS AS *DIMIRI* FLOWER

Dadale vaya O' dadale vaya.

We are small girls, we are small
You are a small girl, you are small
Do not know singing
We are like cluster of *Oogetunda* bush in the jungle.

Your mother-in-law, your mother-in-law
Mother-in-law is *dimiri* flower
Your mother-in-law is useless as *dimiri* flower
She is not good, she is not good
Teeth like mahul fruit
Her teeth are ugly like the seeds of mahul fruit.

Your husband is a *wei* tree
Do not think him to be good
He is like a box of matches
I do not appreciate.

Come with me
There is another village
Where you can go for marriage
Do not go to that house
How do you like that
The villages are like *Natkara* tree
The marriage will be a perfect match
Pumpkin is strong
Make your heart big and strong as pumpkin

Look beautiful like the *bodela* fruit when it is ripe
 The emerging paddy stalk is covered by tender leaves
 You and your husband should be alike.

Almost all the younger girls and even some elder women of the village accompany the bride to the groom's village. When they reach the groom's village, they sing songs criticising and humiliating the groom and such others as they come to see. Sometimes they use even vulgar language for such criticism. As a matter of fact it is considered a privilege in most tribal societies to criticise the groom and if possible his mother, i.e., the bride's mother-in-law. The most striking characteristic of the song is the words in the original which are not merely melodious and alliterative but are also perfectly in harmony with the natural landscape. The song-structure is extremely interesting. Each line has the same phrase repeated twice like *payur mana itke*, which literally means 'your mother-in-law, your mother-in-law' or *kis pudia kudke, kis pudia kudke*, which means he is like a box of matches. Every line is thus repetitively sung. The groom is compared to a *wei* tree whose fruits are very hard. What is implied is that the husband's heart is extremely hard and unsympathetic. It has no soft elements. The girl look beautiful like the *bodela* fruit when it is ripe. The *bodela* is a cucumber-like small creeper on the fences which bears slender reddish green fruits. The paddy stock and the tender leaves enclosing it are compared to the bride and the bridegroom as a match. The mother-in-law's teeth are as ugly as the mahul fruits and its seeds. She is also compared to *dimiri* flower which is of little use. The *natkara* trees are found in a continuous row. The villages along the road are compared to that. *Dadale vaya O dadale vaya*, the refrain line is repeated after each line of the song.

O SPIRIT OF THE HILLS

Re relarerela. rerela rela rela.

O Galali, the spirit in the hills
Bring out herds of *kutra*
Bring the herds towards them.

O spirit of the hills
Bring out herds of deer before them
Bring the herds of deer.

O spirit of the hills
Bring out herds of wild pigs
Bring out herds of *sambar*
Bring out herds of wild buffaloes
Herds of rabbits
Herds of wild goats.

This song is recited on the occasion of ceremonial hunting of the Koyas and is known as *Wija Pandu*. *Wija Pandu* is also the occasion for ritual consecration of seeds of various cereals and pulses which are sown when the monsoon sets in. During this festival, the male folks of a Koya village go to the forests for ceremonial hunting while the females dance in the village

and await their return. In case the group returns without a kill, they are castigated and humiliated by the female folk. In the present song, they entreat Galali, the spirit of the hills to bring out various herds of animals before them so that they can show their worth as better hunters than the malefolk who have proved themselves to be worthless as hunters.

(The first line, if translated literally, would stand as below :

Kutra herds

herds bring O spirit of spirit of the hills

Kutra herd, herd.)

WE ARE THE *MARAT* LEAVES

Vayi dada vaya vayi
Ayaya vaya vayi dada vayi.

The morning has come
The cocks have started calling.

Get up now
There is no dance today.

We are the *marat* leaves
Three in a group.

Work in the orange orchard
So much work ahead.

The cattle tied to their posts
Seeds to be broadcast
Let us go.

The poem is a neat and beautiful picture of a Koya family's daily routine of work. It appears to be a small family of three—the husband, the wife and perhaps a child. The *marat* tree has leaves in clusters of three, two big ones on either side and a small one at the tip—a very appropriate description for the family of three. This is another instance of the capacity for image-making with a

strong visual sense. The woman reminds her husband that this is not a day of rejoicing and there is no festivity and dancing and the hard day lies ahead. The cattle are to be yoked and the seeds to be sown are to be taken along to the hill-slope fields. But the entire statement is not made. It is considered adequate to mention about 'seeds for broadcast' and 'cattle tied to their posts'. The refrain lines given at the beginning of the song is repeated after each stanza.

WHITE AS A CRANE

Vayi nan vaya ayaya
Vaya vayi.

The maize plants dance, the maize plants dance.
All of you dance.

The festival was there
It has now ended.

The babu white as a crane
Coins like tiger's eyes
The stone from the catapult
The automobile has come
We have now to leave.

This song is also a marriage song and is jointly rendered by the boys and girls. It is also accompanied by dance after the singing stops. The boys ask the girls to dance, to move forward and backward like a field of maize when the wind passes over it. The outsider babus in their white dress are compared to cranes. The babus may present them with some coins and the coins are compared with the shining eyes of a tiger. At the end there is a reference to the bus which has arrived near the village. Its speed is compared to the speed of a stone thrown by a catapult.

THE ROADS OF MALKANGIRI

Lover : O my dear beloved, O my dear beloved
We will go away to the kingdom of Nangarajin.

Beloved : O my dear lover, O my dear lover
Which is the way, which is the way.

Lover : Full of curves the roads of Malkangiri.

Beloved : What is the distance, how far is it ?

Lover : It is quite far, it is quite far.

Beloved : You are my life, you are my life.
I will risk it for you, I will risk it for you.

The song narrates a common occurrence in the social life of Koyas. Sometimes married women or unmarried young girls run away with their lovers. This is often due to the inability to pay the high costs of bride price. When a married woman runs away with another man, the husband sometimes chases the two either to get back his wife or at least to claim the bride price. Sometimes out of frustration, he does not hesitate to kill the lover or even his own wife. In case of a unmarried girl, the father of the girl takes similar steps. The kingdom of Nangarajin is a kingdom of plenty and of love which finds mention in Koya myth.

III

THE HOS AND THEIR POETRY



Jantopa : Ho Stone Relics for the Dead

INTRODUCTION

The Hos are found mostly in the district of Mayurbhanj in Orissa and they are also popularly referred to as the Kols. As a matter of fact, the people variously called as the Kols, Kolhas and the Kolah-Kol-Loharas are part of the Ho tribe. According to D. N. Mazumdar "If there be any word that the Hos dislike most, it is the popular epithet Kol by which they are known to the outside world. Whether the word is derived from Sanskrit Kola meaning a pig, as Dalton has suggested, or from the word "Horo", which in course of time has assumed different forms, namely, 'Koro', 'Kola', 'Kol', it is difficult to decide; but it is certain that the word has an unhappy connotation and is, in popular use, a contemptuous term which designates all those savages that cumber the ground. A Ho loathes to be addressed as Kol, and when this happens he will shrug his shoulders and mutter indignantly in protest. Similarly a Ho woman resents being addressed as Kui. Yet the words have come to stay."

This viewpoint, somewhat true for the Chhotnagpur area of Bihar, does not however hold good for Mayurbhanj where the word 'Kol' is not treated as contemptuously. In Mayurbhanj the Hos not only live as close neighbours to the Mundas but also are very much akin to them in language, social relationships and culture. Perhaps some centuries ago they branched off from the main tribe. The Santals sometimes refer to the Hos and Kols as Mundas. Next to Mayurbhanj district, Keonjhar has a sizeable Ho population.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Hos. As in the case of other tribes, quite a few of them are agricultural labourers or marginal farmers. A good number of them also work in factories, mines and quarries in these two districts. The Hos are Hinduised to a large extent and have adopted a number of Hindu festivals. Most of their festivals are linked to the stages in the agricultural operations. Akshaya Tritiya, Salui Puja, Makar Sankranti, Sohrae or Bandana, Gamha Purnima, Raja Sankranti and Karam are some of the more important festivals.

Sohrae is by far their most important festival. The Hos have a fixed place of worship in the village which, like the Santals, they call *Jahera* or the holy grove. Like the Santals again they believe in a large number of malevolent or evil spirits and try to propitiate and appease them through ritual offerings and incantations. *Sing Bonga is the highest god in their pantheon. They also worship Maran Buru like the Santals. Maran Buru literally means the 'Great Hill' and when there is a failure of rain, Maran Buru is worshipped with a sacrifice of a large-sized black he-goat. The village priest or Dehuri makes the offering and sacrifice of the he-goat. The Hos also believe in hill spirits and witch-craft. The sun, the moon, the rivers and the mountains are the principal *Bongas* of the Hos. In the village sacred grove or *Jahera* resides the *Desauli*, the protecting spirit of the village.

The ritual occasions linked to the agricultural cycle are primarily eight in number : (1) Maghe Parab, (2) Baha Parab, (3) Hero Parab, (4) Batauli Parab, (5) Jom Nowa, (6) Gowar Puja, (7) Buru Bonga and (8) Kalam Parab.

Like the Santals, the Hos celebrate their Flower Festival or Baha Parab in the month of March/April (Phalguna/Chaitra) to welcome the spring season. The festival is also locally known as *Phul Bhanguni*. It is

celebrated over three days. On the first day, they clean the houses, the walls and the floor with cow-dung water. They wash all their clothes and take ceremonial bath. On the second day, the real ritual worship is done and it consists of offering of new flowers and fruits by the village *Dehuri* or priest. Sal and mahul flowers, other new fruits including mangoes which have come in the forest are offered to the gods. Without first making such a ritual offering, the Ho girls do not wear the flowers in their coiffure nor do they eat green mangoes. After the worship, the girls decorate themselves with flowering branches of sal and mango. They drink rice-beer and dance both day and night in this three-day festival.

Mage Parab is celebrated in the month of Magh (February/March). In this festival goats and chickens are offered to the gods. Mage festival lasts for seven days. On the first day called *ate-ili* (literally, it means earth and rice-beer), rice-beer is prepared in each house. On the second day the ritual washing and purification of houses and clothes is done. That day and almost the whole of the night are devoted to dancing and singing. The third day is devoted to the ritual worship by the village priest for the entire village. After the worship they play *naqara*, *dhumsa* and other musical instruments and sing and dance. Everybody is dressed up with new clothes. People from neighbouring villages also come and participate. On the fourth day, the traditional ceremonial annual hunt is organised. These days with vanishing forests quite often, instead of entering the forest, they plant a banana tree and shoot their arrows standing in a row at a distance. Whoever shoots the banana tree is carried on shoulders to the house of the village headman or priest. A *pugree* is put on his head and he is given as much rice-beer as he can drink. During this festival, the hired labourers are paid their dues for the year and are also presented with new

clothes. Men and women participate in this dance. Apart from *nagara*, *dhumsa*, flute and *sarangi* are also used. Mage Parab is perhaps the most important festival of the Hos.

The other three important festivals of the Hos are :

(a) Herab or Hero : This festival is celebrated in the month of Asadha (June/July) for three days. It is meant to propitiate the village goddess and to pray for her blessings for good crops. (b) Asadi and Gowar Puja. This is also worship for good crops and is performed at the time of de-weeding in the fields. Different kinds of grain are taken only after this worship. The cattle are given particular attention; vermilion marks are put on their horns and they are offered certain delicacies. (c) Jom Nawa. This is a festival celebrated in the month of Bhādraba (August/September) by the offering of a chicken to the village goddess. Desauli, who protects the village from natural calamities and enemy attack. The early variety of paddy is offered to the goddess, after which rice from it may be taken.

Batauli Parab is a prayer for the fertility of crops. Besides, there is Buru Bonga worship or the worship of Hill God, generally for rain whenever there is a large scale failure of rain and the standing crops are in danger of serious harm. Kalam Parab is thanksgiving to Desauli and Sing Bonga for giving a good harvest. Thus most of the festivals are linked to the agricultural cycle, and the offerings made to the gods, goddesses and spirits are generally chicken, goats, arua rice and liquor. Like the Santali Bakhens these ritual occasions of the Hos are used to propitiate the gods and spirits and to seek their blessings for the community's welfare.

Even to this day, the Hos have an intimate social organisation at the village level and they dispose of all

their disputes both inter-personal and inter-family, in the village assembly. Land disputes, marriage problems and alimony are all decided by the village council, which frames rules for them. Even with the Panchayat Raj bodies functioning in the last two and a half decades, the traditional village council continues to enjoy reputation and authority as an intimate social organisation.

While majority of the Hos speak their own language 'Ho', a little above a quarter of the population have adopted Oriya and can speak it fluently. A few also speak Mundari.

Marriage is the most important social organisation and an elaborate ritual-complex marks this function. Bride price amounting to several heads of cattle or cash makes marriage a difficult proposition for poor bridegrooms or their parents. Negotiations are arranged through traditional marriage brokers known as *dutam karji* who rely a lot on good or evil omen. Some of the inauspicious and evil omen are—the dropping of a branch from a tree, a meeting of wild animals on the road, or the appearance of a squirrel, mongoose or snake, or the barking of a dog.

At the stage of marriage negotiations, some elders from either side, i.e., the bride and bridegroom's side, come to a central place between the two villages. The priests perform what is called *Ere Bonga* to find out the points in favour of and against the marriage. If there are some evil signs, they try to remove them by specified rituals. But if it is considered extremely inauspicious, they decide to call off the negotiations. To consider everything in detail and to take a decision, each side also consults a diviner, called *pandati*. After this, the date for the marriage ceremony is finally fixed. The bride price or *canan* varies from two heads of cattle, two pieces of cloth and rupees fifty in cash to twenty to thirty heads of cattle, several pieces of cloth and sometimes rupees three hundred in

cash. A day before the marriage, people from the bridegroom's side go to the bride's house. They are called *sutuli*; their number varies from five to fifty depending on the bride's economic condition. They carry three or four pots of rice-beer and ten kg of rice. In exchange, the bride's father feeds them sumptuously. The people from the bridegroom's side formally invite the bride. After their return, the next day, i.e. the day of marriage, a group of people from the bride's side, mainly friends of the girl and other womenfolk, go to the groom's house. All of them sing and dance to the beating of *nagara* and *madal*. On arrival at the groom's house they are treated with rice-beer. The bridegroom and the bride are anointed with oil and turmeric paste. The bridegroom is looked after by the ladies from the bride's side and *vice versa*. At this stage a great many songs are sung criticising each other in mock fashion; it goes on almost endlessly. At the beginning of the ritual the bridegroom pours some *handia* from a cup of sal leaves into the bride's cup. This compliment is returned. The groom then puts a mark of vermilion on the forehead of the bride. This completes the marriage. Forcible application of vermilion on the forehead of a maiden in a fair or marketplace is still rare in spite of the forbidding bride price. This is because such behaviour could also be visited by a higher amount of fine imposed through the village council.

The Hos bury their dead. Immediately on the death of a tribesman all elders and the headman arrive and almost the entire village participates. The dead body is carried to the cremation ground on a stringed charpoy (*parkoms*) with its legs pointing upward. The dead body is placed in the pit wrapped up in his own cloth with the bier arranged alongside. Paddy, rice, turmeric, *kachada* oil, goat dung, cow dung, utensils, clothes and cash of the departed are placed in the grave. A small pot of undiluted *handia* is also put in a corner. A huge

uncut slab of stone is placed over the pit to mark the grave and to prevent desecration. One of the most significant landmarks in a Ho village is a group of one or two of these slabs of stone at the funeral ground. The purification ceremony or *Kamani* takes place on the twenty-first day, the blood relations undergoing ritual shaving and the women paring their nails. The *Umbul Adar* ceremony is the final stage in the death rites, when the departed spirit is invited to return to the house

Comparing the menfolk with the womenfolk in Ho society, D. N. Majumdar has said, 'If the Ho men are weak, degenerate and short-lived, the Ho women possess a fine physique, a charming gait and an admirable disposition. The girls are full of life, becoming and decorous in their manners and pleasing in their looks. The women in kolhan are indeed a fine species, and the graceful way they move and the attractive looks they usually possess have endeared them to all travellers and writers'.

The Hos are divided into several exogamous clans known as *killis* and each clan has its own peculiarities of behaviour and customary laws. Boiled rice and home-made rice-beer are the important items of their diet. The mahua tree provides them with a variety of food. They make liquor by distilling mahua flower and they also eat mahua flowers by boiling with sal fruits. Besides, mahua fruits are powdered to make cakes and the seeds are crushed for oil. It would be evident that the Hos possess a number of cultural traits which are very similar to those of the Santals.

MAGE PARAB

My mother has not seen you
My father has not seen you
Like a squirrel you came in
Stealthily through trees and shrubs
And quietly entered our house.

And now...
I lower my head in shame
Anguished I wither as a torn creeper
But you have no shame, you have no remorse.

O uncle moon
Today you have come anew in the sky
From full moon you went on
Reducing yourself to a thin grass-blade.

Today you have arisen afresh
In the western sky
Make us like you
When we are old
We would again come back to childhood.

We can worship you
And be happy
Only if we are alive !

3

Young man

How did you get the news of the Mage festival
Here in our village closed in by mountain ranges
And dense jungles ?

We heard

The plaintive notes of the *sarangi*
The magic waves of the flute.

We are glad the sound of the flute and the *sarangi*
Dragged us here all the way.

4

O oriole bird

O koel

How are our brothers, our sisters
In the ancestral village ?

They are well

But they eat rice on tamarind leaves
And drink water in *māhul* leaves.

Dear brother,

You are sending me to the jungle
To guard our maize fields
I am indeed afraid
For a leopard is lying in wait on the way.

Still I would go

But when the maize is harvested
You must give me a saree
With butterflies on its borders.

BAHA

1

O sal flowers

Come down to us from the tree

O lush green *jamun* leaves

Come down to me.

Let the women washing the clothes

For the festival finish their work

Then I will climb down from the tree

Let you kill a fowl

And I will come down from the tree.

2

O sister

Please do up my coiffure

All my friends have gone for gathering flowers

They would have collected all the flowers

The romantic *panjins* of the forest

The colourful *mataswars* along the river.

I feel so sad

To have missed their company.

3

On the road side, the palas flowers

On the road side, the *nicha* flowers

The birds are pecking at the juice of these flowers

Celestial beings are singing as birds on

each road-side tree.

4

Who took his bath in the sasaghat
Where the orioles sing ?
Who took his bath in the meralghat
Where the *kendu* fruits are ripe in clusters ?

The *naike* took his bath applying soil to his head
At sasaghat
The *naike* took his bath at meralghat.

The *naike* performs a ritual bath, washing his head with an application of soil, and prepares himself for the worship of the gods in the Baha festival. A ghat is a set of steps going down to a river or lake.

5

In whose courtyard
Is the colourful saree ?
In whose courtyard
Rings the *rumjhum nupur* ?

In the *naike's* courtyard
Is the colourful saree
In the *naike's* courtyard
Rings the *rumjhum nupur*.

This song refers to the invocation of the gods at the time of the Baha festival. The gods take possession of select individuals, who are dressed up in sarees with jingling anklets (*nupur*); *rumjhum* is onomatopoeic.

MARRIAGE

1

We went from village to village
From country to country
Looking for a groom.

We could not find a groom
And have now returned empty-handed.

2

Dear girl
You wanted to marry
A groom who had a palace for his house
And polished floor shining as glass
Where are these ?

Your parents-in-law's house
Looks like a pig sty
With only a hole for an entrance.

3

When the tiger roars from the side of the small hill
And the bears cry
You people tremble inside the house
Even though it is morning
And lock yourself up inside
How lazy and afraid you are !

4

We have come from a long distance
A long unending road we have travelled
Take us in quickly
We are hungry and thirsty.

The bride is brought to the bridegroom's house in a procession by the ladies and other relations of the family. When there is a delay in their reception, sometimes they sing this song.

5

The oil and turmeric paste
Of your parents-in-law's house
Seem to be full of sand particles
It can hardly be applied on your soft body.

But the oil and turmeric paste
Brought from your parents' house
Have been mixed with *methi*
And what a fine aroma they emit !

This is sung by the members of the bride's party when they ritually anoint the bride and the bridegroom with oil and turmeric paste and in that context seek to contrast the quality of the cosmetics from the two houses. This is another instance of mutual mock criticism of the bride's group and the bridegroom's group during marriage.

6

Give us some rice beer

Give us some rice.

The rice beer your mother takes

It tastes insipid like water

The broken rice which your father takes

It tastes like straw.

Give us the rice beer and the rice

Or else we will be angry

And keep you in solitary confinement for five days.

After marriage, the bride's cousin sisters and cousin brothers receive rice beer and some cooked rice as a part of the ritual from the bridegroom. Here they are chastising the bridegroom in mock-anger, threatening him with dire consequences.

7

You told us

You would marry

When the full-moon rises in the sky.

The full-moon rose

The landscape shone bright

And now it has set and dawn is breaking

When would you then get married ?

So far there is no sight of the gifts

From your father-in-law's house

No rice, no turmeric powder

No ornaments, no clothes, no vermilion powder.

This song is recited by the friends of an unmarried girl to tease her.

8

You were roaming around
Villages and country-side
Looking for a bridegroom
And nobody was prepared
To give a girl for your boy.

The kitchen fire in your house
Was considered to be the fire of witches
and hobgoblins
We did a good turn by giving our girl in marriage
To your son.

This song is recited by the women folk of the bridegroom's side and this is a mock-criticism of the bride and the bride's relations. Such mock-criticism of each other by the bride's and the bridegroom's sides is very common in tribal marriage.

9

Our friend, the bride
We had placed her beneath mahul tree
And she was as sweet-smelling, as beautiful
as the mahul flower.
Your boy
He was standing under the asan tree
As dry and ugly as the asan fruit.

Our girl, she was eating out on sparkling dishes
And all delicacies
Your boy
He was taking stale rice in a broken earthen plate.

10

in your village
The red ants are everywhere
In all trees with their dirty nests
And no flowers and fruits.

In our village
The *kareya* flower blossoms
And its aroma fills the landscape
You had come running
Blind with its aroma
Young man
Are you not ashamed ?

Are you not ashamed to come running ?
Mad with the aroma of the *kareya* flower !

This is another mock abuse of the bridegroom and the 'charge' of his surrendering to the charms of the young lady whom he has come to marry. It is necessary to remember that many marriages in Ho society, as in other tribal societies, spring out of love and youthful intimacy that develops during associations in dancing and singing.

LOVE

1

When you were a little girl
I have seen you playing in the dust
On our village street.
When I have obstructed your path
You claimed your right of way.

Now when I have grown up
I only want to have a word with you
But nonchalant you reply ;
You are asking for a word from me
A song from me
Come back then with fifteen rupees.

2

In Oriya they call it *daktarkhana*
In Hindi *haspatal*
Whatever name, it really means death.

It is time of your youth
And everything has the colour of violet and rose ;
When you are married
The colours would fade
All the problems of household
Will be on your head.

Alas ! this disease called youth
It is so painful and without cure.

3

Dear friend, in such heat
In the glittering sun
You are collecting lettuce at Kesaribeda ;
Dear friend, in this head-breaking sun
The bright green creepers are breaking as
waves on the fences
From the shrub jungles the girl emerges
Cut-twigs and branches on her head in a bundle.

Let us heed the almanac of sal leaves
The almanac of Mahul flowers
What a beautiful coiffure
What wild flowers on her coiffure
I have seen wild flowers in the jungle
I remember the wild flowers in the jungle.

In this love song the wild flowers become synonymous with the wild mischievous girl friend. And consultation with the almanac of sal leaves and Mahul flowers is to determine whether the girl is going to be his !

4

In the Mahulpali village, the neem flowers
The neem flowers are in blossom
In the Mahulpali village, the kiya flowers
The kiya flowers are in blossom.

Dear friend, let us put on the neem flowers
Dear friend, let us put on the kiya flowers
O those heady kiya flowers !
O those intoxicating neem flowers ! !

GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS

SANTAL

<i>Baha</i>	..	A flower
<i>Bapla</i>		Wedding
<i>Bhandan</i>	..	Final funerary feast
<i>Bir</i>	..	Forest
<i>Bonga</i>	..	Spirit
<i>Buru</i>		Hill or mountain
<i>Erok</i>	.	Sowing; also sowing festival
<i>Godet</i>		Headman's messenger, a village official
<i>Handia</i>		Rice beer
<i>Haprim</i>	.	Ancestor
<i>Jaher</i>		Land of the dead
<i>Jaher Era</i>	.	Land of the Grave
<i>Jantul</i>		Offerings in connection with the first fruits.
<i>Jatra</i>		A gathering of villagers for mass-dancing.
<i>Manghi</i>	.	Headman
<i>Maran Buru</i>	..	Literally means the Great Mountain, perhaps the most important Bonga of the Santals.
<i>Naiké</i>	.	Priest, a village official in charge of offerings and sacrifices to the principal Bongas.
<i>Ojha</i>		Medicine-man, exorcist
<i>Sima</i>		Boundary
<i>Sohrae</i>	.	Harvest festival
<i>Tumdak</i>	.	A drum made from a cylinder of burnt clay.

KOYA

<i>Ahkum</i>	..	Musical horn
<i>Dhol</i>		Drum
<i>Karsu Per ful</i>	.	Forcible marriage
<i>Peda</i>		Village headman
<i>Pendul</i>		Koya marriage
<i>Pendulpata</i>	..	Marriage songs of the Koyas
<i>Perma</i>		The priest
<i>Perma kok</i>		Bicorn horn head-dress
<i>Wadde</i>	..	Village magician
<i>Wasad</i>	..	Flute

HO

<i>Bonga</i>	..	Spirit
<i>Dehuri</i>	..	Priest
<i>Dhumsa</i>	..	The largest-sized Ho drum, a kettle-drum.
<i>Kendu</i>	..	A forest tree which yields pleasant edible fruits.
<i>Kiya</i>	..	A small plant which throws up adventitious roots. It flowers during the rains and its flower has a rich and heady fragrance.
<i>Mahul</i>	..	A forest tree from whose flowers Mahul wine is distilled. This flower is also dried and eaten.
<i>Madal</i>	..	Drum
<i>Nagara</i>	..	A variety of tribal drum, it resembles a madal or dholak.
<i>Nupur</i>	..	Anklet
<i>Pugree</i>	..	Turban
<i>Sarangi</i>	..	A stringed instrument that produces a plaintive music.

APPENDIX—II

TWO EXTRACTS
FROM

HORKOREN MARE HAPRAMKO REAK KATHA

(Traditions and Institutions of the Santals)

Translated with notes and additions

by

P. O. Boddings

from the Santali Text published in 1887

by

L. O. Skrefsrud

[In 1887, the late Rev L. O. Skrefsrud published the Traditions And Institutions of the Santals, *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, as a guide in customary matters and matters of ethnological value relating to the Santals. It was re-edited in 1916 and 1929 by P. O. Boddings whose translation was absolutely literal.

With the exception of a short story of the Santal insurrection of 1885 the original work was taken down by Skrefsrud from the mouth of an old guru named Kolean. According to a statement towards the end of the book, the dictation was finished on the 15th February 1871. Kolean's narrative was based on oral tradition handed down verbatim by teacher to disciple, from generation to generation, a practice which as Skrefsrud once stated "has now fallen into disuse".

Two extracts from this very important and interesting document are given here as throwing useful light on the life and culture of the Santals.]

The Bonga

Among the bongas the Sun bonga is our great bonga. After him comes the Jom Sim bonga; after him Maran Buru (his real name is Lita), after him Jaheera the Lady of the sacred grove (her real name is Ram Salgi), after her Moreko Turuiko. The Five; (we certainly praise The Six, but we do not sacrifice to them) after these Gusaeera (her Ladyship), after her Pargana haram, after him Manjhi haram bonga, after him the Orak House bonga, and after him the Abge bonga. Besides these the ojhas have separate bongas; persons who wish to become rich worship Wealth-bongas. There are boundary bongas, bongas of the hollowed-out water-holes in rivers bongas of the water-pools, bongas of tree-roots and stumps, forest bongas, mountain bongas, and so on. X X

When an old man is dying, he tells the name in a whisper to his eldest son, before he departs. From primeval time we gurus know the names of the Abge bongas and House bongas of all septs.

The Jom sim bonga was not from the beginning, at the Jom festival they were offering only to the Sun bonga. They had, it is told, had a sacrifice to their Abge. When they had eaten and were going home, they forgot a battle-axe and left it there. When they remembered this on their way, one of them ran back to fetch it. To this man the Jom sim bonga revealed himself; he was picking up and eating what was lying scattered there. While he was eating the bonga was talking to himself: Oh now I have felt pleased for the first time. Then seeing the man, he disappeared. The man brought the battle-axe, but he did not tell them of the bonga that had revealed himself. After this they got a good deal of fever, so that they were near dying. Then they had some divination made for them. The ojhas told them: Some bonga or other is revealing himself to you. Then the man who had fetched the battle-axe remembered what had happened to him, saying: Really I saw him when I was fetching the forgotten battle-axe. I heard him say: Now I have felt pleased for the first time. Therefore they called this bonga Ahan. The ojhas said to them: This bonga says 'Offer to me at the Jom sim festival'. From that time the Santals worship him.